

MULTIMODALITY AND MULTIMEDIALITY IN COMMUNICATION

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Abstract: Many of the latest studies on the new communication technologies tend to focus more on the opportunities and facilities provided by the transmission medium rather than on the modes of representation. Starting from the idea that the various forms of representation or communication and their means of dissemination are intrinsically linked, in this paper we intend to highlight some aspects related to the production of the message from this particular perspective. The diversity of the forms of representation, which is generated by the peculiarities of the medium of transmission, coupled with the variety of means to process and transfer them demand a complex approach to the message. Hence, we will analyze the creation of a promotional message for an MA study program and we will emphasize the constraints imposed by the context, the aim and the communication framework, on the one hand, as well as the implications for the message due to the multiplicity of the communication channels, on the other. In other words, we attempt to showcase the multimodality and the multimediality of communication.

Keywords: multimodal message, new communication technologies, medium, role, visibility.

1. Introduction

For the time being, a discussion about the effect of communication involves undoubtedly the new communication technologies in their dual aspect, both as a tool of representing communication and as a transmission medium. The diversity of representation forms that is generated by the particularities of the transmission environment, the variety of processing ways and of their transfer by means of the new technologies have constituted the target which has lately attracted the researchers' interest. Most of the studies focused on the new communication technologies tend to put emphasis on the opportunities and facilities provided by the transmission medium, leaving the concern with the modes of representation on a secondary level. We believe that the contribution of the new communication technologies, perceived in the complementarity of their dual role –of producing, and respectively, transmitting the message - leads to more streamlined communication. Thus, the involvement of the text creator in terms of making use of the new technologies, dissociates in two directions: the construction of representations (of the message) and their dissemination.

In the present paper, we start from the premise that the connection between various possibilities for the representation of certain content and the range of modalities used to disseminate the message, both of them offered by the new communication technologies, contributes to the creation and proliferation of the meaning of a message. Consequently, we proposed to reveal the multimodality and "multimediality" of the discourse that characterizes the modern communication.

2. Definition of concepts

The concepts underpinning our approach are *multimodality* and "*multimediality*", the latter being a lexicalization / nomination of the term "*multimedia*", adapted to Romanian language by calquing the English word form *multimodality* (C. Jewitt, 2004: 184). The two terms in question are composed by means of the prefix *multi-*, the former being centred on the word *mode*, and the latter on the word *media*. The *mode* refers to any organised form/way (e.g., image, gesture, posture, speech, music, writing and other configuration of items of this type). *Media* is defined as any organized means of representation of the message (the substance through which the message becomes available to the others) (G. Kress et al., 2001).

To observe the ability of the new communication technologies to generate meaning by associating the functions of representational production and message transmission and thus create a greater impact on the receiver, we proposed our Master's degree students a micro transdisciplinary project. The project involved the creation of representations of the interdisciplinary Master's degree programme called *Communication, Public Relations and Digital Media* using technical means and their broadcasting on Facebook in order to increase the visibility of the programme. This paper is in fact a corollary of the project and an interpretation of the work performed within its frame.

3. Project description

- *Background:* The project relates, on one hand, to the concepts of communication involved in the elaboration of the message (the disciplines *Discursive Principles and Strategies* and *Theories and Approaches in Modern Communication*), and on the other hand, to the technical concepts (the discipline *Digital Media*).
- *Content/Purpose:* The creation of multimodal messages using new communication technologies.
 - Stage I - the creation of multimodal messages using new communication technologies, centred on highlighting the usefulness and practical relevance of the study programme;
 - Stage II - disseminating messages in the virtual environment and following up their effects.
- *Results:* The project resulted in five short films: *Film CRPMD* (Golub Alexandrina), *We Communicate, Build, Save, We DO NOT Speak Airplanes at Master's Studies*, *We Do Not Venture, We Communicate*, and *Does Social Media Override You?*.

4. Project Content

4.1. Area of communication

The accomplishment of the project from the perspective of the disciplines *Discursive Principles and Strategies* and *Theories and Approaches in Modern Communication* involved a set of preparatory activities such as: analysing of the audience to whom the messages are addressed, setting the purpose and the context of communication, selecting the message transmission channel, and developing the actual messages.

The analysis of the audience focused on questions such as: *Whom do I turn to?; What does the receiver know?; What would s/he like to know / What interests her/him?; What reaction would the message produce to the receiver (did s/he understand it?/was it annoying? etc.)?; What helps the receiver understand the message better?; How does the receiver see message (as well-written/ clear/ insolent)?*. The target audience of message is made up of graduates of the Bachelor's degree in Communications, Electronics and Telecommunications.

The purpose was set based on answers to questions such as: *Why do I write this message ?; What do I want to achieve ?; What are my goals ?; How am I to achieve the desired results?*. Defining the purpose has contributed, along with the audience analysis to the selection of concepts on which the films were built.

Specifying the context and the background of communication have involved difficulties as regards the framing of the message (selecting the adequate degree of formalization of the message). Another issue that raised some problems was the choice and use of a style appropriate to the communication situation, involving suitability to audience, context and purpose of communication, given the different weight that students have attributed to the audience criterion.

Establishing the component elements of the message to be sent was performed by:

- Creating a list through brainstorming,
- Eliminating irrelevant information,
- Grouping related information,
- Deciding on the manner of content expression / communication (verbal, nonverbal, the sounds, combination of textual, imagery and auditory elements, and the style of the message - adequacy, capturing attention, predicting feedback).

The difficulties in this phase of work consisted in selecting the type of information and the quantity of information to be transmitted.

There are three types of information that the resulted movies focus on, namely: the specificity of the programme - the **interdisciplinarity**, as response to the requirements and needs of the contemporary society and the acquisition of both specific and necessary skills (1 message), the ability to **communicate effectively**, including the use the **social media** (3 messages) and the development of certain transversal skills - **creativity, team spirit** - (1 message). The messages are constructed by combining several types of language: verbal (written and oral aspects), non-verbal, images and sounds. Of the five films, one is animated, based on images and sounds, one is mixed, meaning that it uses all the types of language mentioned above and the other three reflect the students' option for non-verbal language. In filmmaking, various argumentative approaches have been followed: pragmatic, emphasizing practical relevance, the usefulness of the Master's degree programme - 3 messages, comparative - communication yesterday and today - 1 message; humour - 1 message.

In terms of film style, we see that the classic one is prevalent, three films being designed based on elements specific to the narrative style: causality, sequence of events / actions, progress from one incipient moment towards the final moment, the surprise. The other two films have chosen animation and, respectively, parody. It should be noted, in the case of the latter, that serious registry items conveyed through written verbal message, counterbalance humour:

Competition + Commitment = Perseverance;
Creativity + Commitment = Diversity.

4.2. Technical Area

From a technical standpoint, the construction of the messages, involved the following: filming, image editing and video editing.

The achievement of these operations was performed by a connectivity of the students both intra- and inter-group, signifying not only the students' contribution to the initially set tasks, but also their taking over additional tasks related to different situations assumed while working inside other teams.

Subsequently, if at the beginning of the project teams were formed, and tasks were set and each individual got her/his well-defined role, during the implementation phase of the project, we noticed a change in the state of things in the sense of opening, an expansion of interaction, most students taking on different roles in other teams.

The purpose of the project was, of course, the dissemination of these short films in the virtual environment, YouTube and on Facebook pages of individual students, which meant connecting, networking, and for the Master's programme, this meant emphasizing visibility and a genuine means of promotion.

5. Conclusion

In terms of communication, the project included: **participation, contribution, sharing, collaboration, networking, openness, creativity, focus, dissemination**, in short, **interaction, connectedness**, which generated **semantic dynamism**. Thus, the project demonstrates the functioning of the connection between the diversity of the modes of communication assisted by new technologies, on the one hand, and the diversification of modes of messaging, on the other hand, in order to strengthen the visibility of the Master Study Programme "*Communication, Public Relations and Digital Media*".

Multimodality and *multimediality* of communication came to be fulfilled for enduring the project. Beyond the stated purpose of the project, the multi-(modal and "medial") character, as mark of current communication, has deeply influenced the effective development of the project by eliminating certain borders: conceptual, executive, organizational ones that have been traced at the start of the project and by showing flexibility. Thus, along the way, the students have taken on roles other than the pre-set ones, which led to a continuous metamorphosis of the internal cells of the group, with implications in the production of messages. The progress of the project involved the operation of multimodal and multimedia communication by reconfiguring the roles originally assumed by students, and by reconfiguring the formed teams, too, which had a positive impact on the building of messages and on producing meaning.

References

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